

Ohio unfortunately ranks 11th in the Nation in breast cancer deaths and 9th in total cancer deaths among women.

Northeast Ohio has been particularly hard hit by this tragedy. There is no magic bullet in our fight against breast cancer. There is no vaccine. There is no guaranteed cure. However, early screening, detection and treatment of breast cancer offer women the best hope of beating breast cancer and leading long, healthy lives.

In an effort to increase local awareness of the importance of early detection and treatment options, I helped found the Northeast Ohio Breast and Prostate Cancer Task Force in 1994.

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This dedicated group of volunteers includes cancer survivors, medical researchers, and health care professionals such as doctors and nurses.

The mission of the task force is twofold:

First, it works to support and supplement ongoing public education efforts in breast cancer in northeast Ohio. Last year, the members of the task force put together a comprehensive, easily readable pamphlet to provide information to women on how to prevent breast cancer and the importance of periodic screening. It was packed with information on counseling and whom to talk to about treatment options.

Volunteers distributed these pamphlets to 273 hairdressers and beauty salons in northeast Ohio in a local campaign to eradicate breast cancer. We worked with the Women's Preventive Health Care Services program offered by the Cuyahoga County Board of Health, which provides information on early detection of breast and cervical cancer to medically underserved women, a group historically vulnerable to these killers.

The task force's second mission is to seek out any environmental factors which may cause northeast Ohio's higher than average rates of breast cancer.

To further this mission, my colleague, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. STUPAK], and I were able to add language to last year's reauthorization of the Safe Drinking Water Act which requires the EPA to test whether certain chemicals found in drinking water cause breast or other forms of cancer.

The stories of the women at the Elyria YWCA and the efforts of the task force are vital because they represent our most important and potent weapon in the battle against breast cancer. Through the tireless efforts of breast cancer survivors, the local health care community, and ordinary residents and business owners, one small community is taking a stand. As their elected officials in Washington, we must do more, however, to help win this battle.

We must support legislation currently before us which would ensure that health insurance companies provide coverage for women who undergo mastectomies and the reconstructive

surgery often required after this procedure.

Furthermore, women must never be forced out of the hospital on the same day a mastectomy is performed unless the patient and the doctor, not the insurance company, the patient and the doctor agree that it is in the patient's best health interest.

Lastly, we must continue to support increased funding for more biomedical research to improve treatment and to find a cure for breast cancer in other terminal and chronic diseases.

Until we are able to find a cure for deadly diseases like breast and prostate cancer, early detection and screening represent the best hope for the millions of men and women who will be diagnosed with these diseases. We should join with the millions of Americans, like the women at the Elyria YWCA and members of the task force, who are on the front lines spreading this life-saving message.

As we listen to stories of hope and sadness by those individuals whose lives have been touched by breast cancer, let us work together in Washington to ensure that patients have access to affordable, quality health care and demonstrate our commitment to winning this battle by providing the research dollars necessary for improving treatment and finding a cure.

SUPPORT OF LEGISLATION TO HELP WOMEN FIGHT BREAST CANCER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas [Mr. BENTSEN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of legislation that will help to fight breast cancer. These bills, including H.R. 1350 and H.R. 164, would ensure that women have sufficient time to recover from breast cancer treatments and ensure that women have the medical treatments they need to fight this difficult and dreadful disease.

Already 135 would ensure that women and doctors can work together to determine what is the best treatment for each woman. I am an original cosponsor of this bill that will require all health plans to provide minimum hospital stays for those women who undergo mastectomies and lymph node dissections. Without this protection, women may have to choose between their health and their treatments. In the past, Congress has acted to provide minimum protections for pregnant women and their children and we should provide the same protections for women with breast cancer.

H.R. 164 would ensure that women with breast cancer would receive the necessary breast reconstruction surgeries they need. This legislation would require all health plans to provide coverage for this surgery. Many health plans do not currently provide this coverage because health plans be-

lieve these surgeries are not necessary. I believe doctors and patients should decide which treatment plan would benefit each patient without interference from their health plans. This legislation would provide this much needed protection for breast cancer patients.

I would like to commend the gentlewoman from Connecticut [Ms. DELAURO] for organizing this special order to highlight these bills as part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. It is particularly important to me, as the Representative of the Texas Medical Center, that I have many constituents who are active in the fight against the disease that we can defeat.

In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I would also like to highlight the work of two outstanding individuals who are constituents of mine: One, Dr. Dixie Melillo, a physician who operates the Rose, a clinic targeting women and in particular low-income women to ensure that they receive adequate breast cancer screening and treatment.

After years of hard work, Dr. Melillo has been able to expand her operation to three clinics in and around my district, and I commend her for her work.

Second, I want to honor Dr. Jennifer Cousins, who runs the Women's Health Initiative at Baylor College of Medicine, which recently celebrated its third anniversary.

Three years ago, the National Institutes of Health awarded Baylor College of Medicine a grant of \$11.8 million to conduct the largest, longest clinical trial in Baylor's history. This study is examining the health of more than 5,400 women over a 12-year period, and focuses on diseases that are critically important to the health of women: Cardiovascular, colorectal cancer, osteoporosis and, in particular, breast cancer. Breast cancer is the second killer among cancer in women.

The information provided by the Women's Health Initiative will lead to breakthrough treatments for these diseases and improve the lives of women in Texas and across the Nation. The Baylor Clinical Center has recruited 3,300 women for an observational study to gather information regarding risk factors for these diseases.

The Baylor Clinical Center will also recruit an additional 2,100 women for a clinical trial to research whether diet and hormone replacement therapy will help women lead healthier lives. Information gathered from this clinical study will help women to make informed decisions about which therapies to use to prevent the disease and stay healthy.

I also want to highlight the efforts of Dr. Jennifer Cousins, Director for the Center for Women's Health, to bring this critical WHI study to the Houston area. I believe Dr. Cousins is critical to the success of this study, and she should be commended for her hard work.

Mr. Speaker, to really honor these two women leaders in Houston, the

House should schedule and pass H.R. 135 and H.R. 164 and show that we too in the House mean business in the fight against breast cancer.

REPUBLICAN LEGISLATION ATTACKS PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I expect to be joined in a few minutes by one of my colleagues.

This evening I would like to talk about the efforts that have been made by the Republican leadership to move various legislation which I consider essentially an attack on public education in this country.

Democrats, for a long time, certainly throughout this Congress, have stressed the need for this Congress to address education in various ways. We started out during the debate on the Balanced Budget Act this summer stressing the need for better access to higher education.

In fact, as a result of President Clinton's efforts and the efforts of the Democrats joining with him, we were able to include in the Balanced Budget Act, when it passed, some significant measures that would provide more access to higher education for the average American in terms of expanding student loan programs, providing tax deductions or tax credits that make it easier for the average American, the working American, to pay for college education or graduate education.

But now, after the Balanced Budget Act was passed, and certainly starting this fall, we have talked increasingly about the need to address the problems in our public schools, but in a very positive way. Our feeling is that the public schools in America are in pretty good shape but they certainly need improvement and that there are various ways to go about improving them.

One of the areas that we have talked about the most is the need to address the public school infrastructure. The fact of the matter is there are many public schools that have great need for repairs or even new construction because of expanded enrollment but do not have the ability within their school district to pay for those school construction or renovation needs.

In addition, there is the whole issue of basic skills; that more needs to be done to improve learning with regard to basic skills in the various public schools. And the Democrats have actually come up with a whole series of ideas about ways to improve public education, which I may get into this evening with some of my colleagues.

But before I do that, I wanted to talk about the fact that instead of emphasizing the need to improve the public schools, where better than 90 percent of

America's students are enrolled, the Republican leadership, at least in the last few weeks, has instead embarked on an effort to try to take away resources, taxpayer dollars, from the public schools and use them, or credit them, to private or religious school initiatives.

Now, the best example of that was 2 weeks ago, before we adjourned for the district work period, the Speaker actually brought to the floor as part of the D.C., District of Columbia, appropriation bill a private school voucher program. It was a provision that would basically have provided funding to a very limited number of students within the District of Columbia, I think 2,000, approximately, which is really a drop in the bucket in terms of the number of students in the D.C. Public schools, and allowed them to take that voucher and use it for private schools either in the District of Columbia or in surrounding States.

This provision initially failed to pass the House, and the reason it failed to pass was essentially because most Members, and I am one of them, do not believe that it makes sense to take resources that could be used for things like school construction in the District of Columbia, which has a great need for school construction and renovation, and instead use that money to pay for private education.

The Speaker did not have the votes, actually, for the D.C. appropriation bill, in part because of the voucher provision, but what he did was he held the vote open and he twisted some fellow Republican arms to change their votes so he finally got a majority of one to pass the bill.

Despite this near failure, and I say near failure, because the way it was done it was clearly an indication that this was not a measure that had the support of a majority within this House of Representatives, but nonetheless, even with that, keeping that in mind, the Speaker is now once again, and the Republican leadership is now once again taking another step in this same direction, taking resources that could be used for public education and using them to pour taxpayer dollars into private and religious schools.

This was a provision that was originally proposed in the Senate by Senator COVERDELL. He has called it an education savings account but, essentially, it primarily benefits wealthy families. It allows them to basically provide tax-free funds that would be used to pay for private education.

Now, Democrats, and I believe this is coming up tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, but Democrats basically will put forth an alternative that will use this money for school construction bonds to help public schools that are in disrepair or in need of new construction. Without getting into the specifics of this provision, which I oppose, I am trying to make the point, and I think we as Democrats are making the point, that we need to improve the public schools

rather than siphon Federal dollars for private schools.

We should not be giving up on the public schools. The public schools are where most of our children are educated. We have had an historic commitment to public schools in this country and, if anything, and I feel very strongly, we should be moving a Democratic initiative, which we have discussed and which our Democratic task force has put forward, that would provide improvements for public education rather than siphoning off this money for private and religious schools.

I see one of the cochairmen of the Democratic education task force, which has taken the initiative to put forward these principles for America's public schools, my colleague from North Carolina, is here.

I was going to briefly, if I could, just outline some of the principles that the gentleman and his task force have put together, just to juxtapose those to what the Republican leadership has been trying to do in the last couple of weeks, and if I could just mention six very briefly.

These are the principles for America's public schools. First, an emphasis on academic excellence in the basics; second, well-trained, motivated teachers to help children achieve high standards; third, using public dollars to improve public schools rather than private school vouchers at public expense, which we have discussed; fourth, the Federal role in education that supports local initiatives for strong neighborhood public schools; fifth, empower parents to choose the best public school for their children; and, sixth, every child should have access to a safe, well-equipped public school.

Again, the task force does not take the position they are opposed to choice, but the choice should be in the public schools. We do not want to take taxpayer dollars and use them for private education.

I would like at this time to yield to my colleague, the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. ETHERIDGE], who has taken the lead on this and who has been so well-spoken because of his background and experience on the issue of public education.

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Mr. ETHERIDGE. I appreciate the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] yielding and I appreciate very much the gentleman putting together this special order, because I think it is important to the American people to understand. Let me set a little history, if I may before we get to this because I think it is important.

I think of a great Congressman who represented the district that I now represent many years ago, a gentleman by the name of Harold Cooley, who at that time chaired the Committee on Agriculture in the U.S. Congress. It was his task to chair the Agriculture Committee during and right after World War II. Many of our young people who went